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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/WE (MENNUTI), WHA/CCA, DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/19/2013

TAGS: [PREL PHUM KIRF CU PHUM KIRF CU PHUM KIRF CU VT VTPREL VTPREL](#)

SUBJECT: HOLY SEE HOPES BRIGITTINE CONVENT IN HAVANA WILL
OPEN DOOR TO MORE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

REF: HAVANA 4892

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR JIM NICHOLSON, REASON E.O. 12958 1.5 (B,D)

SUMMARY

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1. (C) MFA CARIBBEAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR MONS. GIORGIO LINGUA TOLD US MARCH 28 THAT THE HOLY SEE STILL HOPED THAT THE MARCH 8 OPENING OF THE BRIGITTINE SISTERS' HOUSE IN HAVANA, DEVELOPED WITH CASTRO'S COOPERATION, WOULD HELP PAVE THE WAY TO GREATER CHURCH ACCESS TO THE CUBAN PEOPLE. THE HOLY SEE REGRETTED CASTRO'S TURNING THE OPENING CEREMONY INTO A PROPAGANDA OPPORTUNITY, BUT IS WILLING TO GRIT ITS TEETH FOR THE TIME BEING. THE HOLY SEE WAS PLEASANTLY SURPRISED AT CARDINAL ORTEGA'S STRONG PASTORAL LETTER OF FEBRUARY 24 AND THE CUBAN BISHOPS' LETTER OF MARCH 11 REACTING AGAINST THE CASTRO GOVERNMENT'S PROPAGANDA USE OF THE BRIGITTINE SISTERS (REFTEL). LINGUA BELIEVED THAT BRIGITTINE MOTHER TEKLA, CARDINAL SEPE, AND THE HOLY SEE ITSELF HAD MISPLAYED THE BRIGITTINE CONVENT OPENING, NOT JUST BY LEAVING THE DOOR OPEN FOR CASTRO TO PROPAGANDIZE, BUT ALSO BY EXERCISING POOR COORDINATION AND JUDGMENT IN THEIR PUBLIC ACTIVITIES. MOTHER TEKLA HERSELF TOLD US THAT NO SPECIAL HONORS WERE ACCORDED CASTRO AT THE OPENING CEREMONY, AND THAT SHE INVITED HIM TO THE INAUGURATION OUT OF "CHARITY" AND CHRISTIAN COURTESY, GIVEN THAT HE HAD BOTH PERMITTED AND EXPEDITED THE PROJECT. NOTING THAT SHE HAD RECEIVED THREATENING LETTERS FROM "MIAMI CUBANS," SHE EMPHASIZED HER DESIRE TO STAY OUT OF POLITICS, EXPAND THE BRIGITTINE PRESENCE INTO THE POORER PROVINCES, AND CONTINUE TO OPEN DOORS TO ANY IN CUBA WHO CARE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF HER SANCTUARY FOR REFLECTION, PRAYER AND RENEWAL. END SUMMARY.

BRIGITTINE CONVENT OPENING EXPOSES CATHOLIC DIVISIONS

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2. (C) EMBASSY MET WITH MFA CUBAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR MONS. GIORGIO LINGUA MARCH 21, TO GET HIS TAKE ON THE APPARENT DIVISIONS BETWEEN CUBAN CARDINAL ORTEGA AND BRIGITTINE MOTHER TEKLA, SIGNALLED IN THE CUBAN BISHOPS' LETTER "CLARIFYING" THAT THE CUBAN CHURCH HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH CASTRO'S APPEARANCE AT THE MARCH 8 OPENING OF THE BRIGITTINE SISTERS' HOUSE AND CARDINAL ORTEGA'S EARLIER PASTORAL LETTER EMPHASIZING THAT THERE IS NO REAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN CUBA (REFTEL). THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE OPENING OF THE BRIGITTINE HOUSE HAD BEEN REPORTED IN VATICAN-RELATED PRESS SHORTLY AFTER THE BISHOPS ISSUED THEIR MARCH 11 LETTER. LINGUA TOLD US THE HOLY SEE STILL HOPED THE OPENING OF THE BRIGITTINE SISTERS' HOUSE IN HAVANA WOULD HELP PAVE THE WAY TO GREATER CHURCH ACCESS IN CUBA, THUS THE HOLY SEE WAS WILLING TO GRIT ITS TEETH AND ACCEPT CASTRO'S PROPAGANDIZING OF THE OPENING CEREMONY.

3. (C) SEEKING TO DAMPEN THE DIFFERENCES THAT AROSE BETWEEN ORTEGA AND BRIGITTINE MOTHER TEKLA OVER CASTRO'S EFFORTS TO CAPITALIZE ON THE CONVENT'S OPENING, LINGUA INSISTED THAT TEKLA AND CARDINAL SEPE, WHO ATTENDED THE OPENING, REPRESENTED ONLY THEMSELVES -- NOT THE HOLY SEE. LINGUA UNDERScoreD THAT CARDINAL SEPE, WHO HEADS THE VATICAN CONGREGATION FOR EVANGELIZATION, WAS NOT A PAPAL ENVOY SENT TO COMMEMORATE THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE POPE'S CUBA TRIP (AS CASTRO REPORTEDLY SAID TO THE TV CAMERAS). LINGUA AGREED THAT CARDINAL ORTEGA AND THE CUBAN CLERGY HAD A LEGITIMATE BEEF WITH HOW MOTHER TEKLA HAD ORGANIZED THE CONSTRUCTION AND INAUGURATION OF HER CONVENT (I.E. VIA DIRECT COMMUNICATION WITH CASTRO AND THE POPE RATHER THAN VIA THE CUBAN BISHOPS). HE ADMITTED THAT THE HOLY SEE HAD NOT MANAGED THE EVENT WELL,

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NOTING THAT MOTHER TEKLA "IS NOT CONTROLLABLE" AND THAT CARDINAL SEPE HAD TRAVELED TO THE OPENING AND OFFERED REMARKS WITHOUT CLEARING EITHER THE TRAVEL OR THE REMARKS WITH THE SECRETARIAT OF STATE. LINGUA ALSO HIGHLIGHTED THE

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SECRETARIAT'S CONCERN AT THE ACTIVITIES OF MEXICAN CARDINAL

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SANDOVAL DURING THE WEEK OF THE CONVENT OPENING, IN PARTICULAR SANDOVAL'S ILL-CONSIDERED PUBLIC VISIT TO AND POSITIVE COMMENTS AT A CLINIC WHERE THE CUBAN CHURCH HAD FOR YEARS BEEN SEEKING PERMISSION TO MINISTER, WITHOUT SUCCESS.

MOTHER TEKLA AND PERSONAL DIPLOMACY

14. (C) TO HEAR THE BRIGITTINE SIDE OF THE STORY, EMBASSY OFFICERS MET MARCH 20 WITH MOTHER TEKLA FAMIGLIETTI, ABBESS GENERAL OF THE BRIGITTINE SISTERS, TO DISCUSS HER VISIT TO CUBA TO OPEN THE CONVENT IN HAVANA. SHE AFFIRMED THAT THE PROJECT ORIGINATED DURING HER VISIT TO MEXICO, WHICH COINCIDED WITH CASTRO'S PARTICIPATION IN THE INAUGURATION OF

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO LOG-00 NP-00 AMAD-00 CIAE-00 INL-00 DODE-00 WHA-00
PERC-00 DS-00 FBIE-00 VC-00 TEDE-00 INR-00 LAB-01
VCE-00 NSAE-00 DHS-00 PA-00 SS-00 DSCC-00 PRM-00
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P 021111Z APR 03 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY
INFO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
USINT HAVANA PRIORITY

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PRESIDENT FOX. AFTER MEXICAN CARDINAL SANDOVAL INTRODUCED HER TO CASTRO, A SERIES OF CIRCUMSTANCES LED TO CASTRO WRITING TO POPE JOHN PAUL II TO ASK FOR HIS BLESSING ON MOTHER TEKLA'S PLANS TO OPEN A CONVENT IN CUBA, WHICH WAS RECEIVED. WHILE CARDINAL ORTEGA GAVE HIS OWN PERMISSION FOR THE ORDER TO ESTABLISH ITS PRESENCE IN HIS DIOCESE, MOTHER TEKLA TOLD US THE CARDINAL DID NOT ACTIVELY SUPPORT THE PROJECT. BECAUSE ORTEGA COULD OFFER THE CONVENT ONLY A
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COUNTRY PROPERTY "MILES OUTSIDE OF HAVANA," TEKLA TOLD US SHE TURNED TO CASTRO, AND CUBA'S COMMUNIST PARTY GAVE HER THE CONVENT BUILDING IN DOWNTOWN HAVANA. FIDEL CASTRO PERSONALLY INTERVENED TO ENSURE THAT THE BUILDING'S RENOVATION AND INAUGURATION PROCEEDED WITHOUT ANY OF THE NORMAL BUREAUCRATIC OBSTACLES, SHE SAID, IN ORDER TO HAVE IT READY FOR THE "ANNIVERSARY OF THE POPE'S VISIT." THE RENOVATION COSTS WERE COVERED BY DONATIONS SOLICITED BY MOTHER TEKLA'S ORDER, AND THE VATICAN'S NUNCIATURE ASSISTED WITH IMPORTING BUILDING MATERIALS AND FITTINGS USUALLY HARD TO COME BY IN CUBA.

15. (C) CUBAN CATHOLIC CHURCH OFFICIALS WERE CLEARLY MIFFED AT MOTHER TEKLA'S OUT-OF-CHANNELS APPROACH TO CASTRO AND THE POPE, AND ESPECIALLY THE PROPAGANDA OPPORTUNITY IT AFFORDED CASTRO, AND DID NOT ATTEND THE INAUGURATION CEREMONY DURING WHICH THE CUBAN LEADER FEATURED PROMINENTLY. MOTHER TEKLA STRESSED THAT, CONTRARY TO MEDIA REPORTS, SHE ACCORDED NO SPECIAL HONORS TO CASTRO, AND THAT SHE INVITED HIM TO THE INAUGURATION OUT OF CHARITY AND "CHRISTIAN COURTESY," GIVEN THAT HE HAD EXPEDITED THE PROJECT. SHE TOLD US SHE GAVE HIM ONE OF HER OWN ORDER'S MEDALS FOR HIS EFFORT "TO SUPPORT ECUMENISM" ONLY IN RESPONSE TO THE VARELA MEDAL CASTRO HAD OFFERED HER. SHE INSISTED THAT NEITHER GIFT MEANT MUCH MORE THAN SIMPLE COURTESY, AND UNDERScoreD THAT THE BRIGITTINE MEDAL IS NOT AN OFFICIAL HOLY SEE RECOGNITION.

16. (C) MOTHER TEKLA ASSURED US THAT HER ORDER IS NOT IN CUBA FOR POLITICAL REASONS. IN FACT, SHE SAID THE CHURCH SHOULD STAY OUT OF POLITICS AND INSISTED THAT CHRISTIAN CHARITY WAS THE SOLE MOTIVE FOR HER ORDER'S PRESENCE IN CUBA. SHE SAID THE CONVENT SEEKS TO PROMOTE PEACE AND JUSTICE THROUGH
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REFLECTION, AND CUBANS HAVE ALREADY BEEN COMING FOR RELIGIOUS

INSTRUCTION, BAPTISM, AND TO RECEIVE BIBLES. MOTHER TEKLA ALSO NOTED THAT MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY HAVE ALSO CONTACTED THE CONVENT. THE ORDER HOPES TO OPEN ANOTHER CENTER IN CUBA, PREFERABLY IN A POOR AREA OF THE COUNTRY OUTSIDE OF HAVANA. HOWEVER, SHE SAID HAVANA'S CARDINAL ORTEGA HAS HER SISTERS UNDER FIRM CONTROL AND HINTED THAT THE CARDINAL MIGHT OBSTRUCT HER ORDER'S EXPANSION.

17. (C) MOTHER TEKLA TOLD US THAT PRIOR TO HER VISIT TO CUBA SHE HAD RECEIVED "THREATENING LETTERS" FROM CUBAN MIGRS IN MIAMI WHICH, SHE SAID, WERE AIMED AT DEMORALIZING HER. SHE REGRETTED THE FACT THAT THE PUBLIC CIRCUS SURROUNDING THE OPENING OF HER HOUSE HAD CAUSED A RIFT BETWEEN ORTEGA AND HER SISTERS, AND BY "POLITICIZING" THE EVENT APPARENTLY STIMULATED PEOPLE TO SEND THE LETTERS.

COMMENT

18. (C) THE HOLY SEE IS CLEARLY EMBARRASSED AT HOW POORLY THEY MANAGED THIS AFFAIR. NEVER AN INSTITUTION TO MAKE A BOLD DIPLOMATIC GESTURE, AS MONS. LINGUA HAS TOLD US MANY TIMES, THE SECRETARIAT OF STATE IS NERVOUS ABOUT A POSSIBLE CRACKDOWN ON THE LIMITED RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS THE CUBAN CHURCH GAINED AFTER THE POPE'S 1998 VISIT TO THE ISLAND. HE SAID THEY NEVERTHELESS PLACED MUCH HOPE IN THE BRIGITTINE CONVENT SETTING A PRECEDENT TO OPEN THE WAY FOR THE MANY OTHER PENDING REQUESTS OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES TO GAIN ACCESS TO CUBA. WE BELIEVE THERE IS SOMETHING ELSE HAPPENING HERE TOO.
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MOTHER TEKLA IS REPUTED TO HAVE A DIRECT CONNECTION TO POPE JOHN PAUL II, WHO HIMSELF IS KNOWN TO MAKE THE OCCASIONAL BOLD GESTURE. CARDINAL SEPE IS A FAVORED SON, WHO WAS ELEVATED TO CARDINAL AND MADE PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLE (THE OLDEST AND SOME SAY MOST POWERFUL DICASTRY) IN 2001, IN PART FOR HIS GOOD WORK ORGANIZING THE 2000 JUBILEE YEAR -- A CHERISHED PROJECT OF JOHN PAUL II. WE FIND IT IMPLAUSIBLE THAT SEPE ATTENDED THIS EVENT ONLY AS A "FRIEND OF MOTHER TEKLA." IT SEEMS MORE LIKELY THAT THE POPE HIMSELF PUT GREAT STORE IN THE OPENING OF THE BRIGITTINE CONVENT (WHICH WAS REFLECTED IN THE MANY FULL PAGES OF COVERAGE IT RECEIVED IN OSSERVATORE ROMANO -- THE VATICAN OFFICIAL NEWS DAILY). IN THIS CONTEXT, WE BELIEVE IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE POPE WISHED TO USE THE OPENING OF THE CONVENT TO HELP PRY OPEN THE DOORS TO GREATER RELIGIOUS LIBERTIES IN SUCH AS WAY THAT THE CUBAN CLERGY ITSELF WAS PROTECTED FROM ANY BACKLASH.

19. (C) WE LEAVE TO USINT TO ASSESS WHETHER THE CONVENT OPENING WILL EVENTUALLY LEAD TO GREATER RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN CUBA AND WHETHER THE EVENT HAS OR HAS NOT CREATED LASTING

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00	WHA-00
	DS-00	FBIE-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01	VCE-00
	NSAE-00	PA-00	IRM-00	SS-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-01
	SAS-00	/002W					

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SUBJECT: HOLY SEE HOPES BRIGITTINE CONVENT IN HAVANA WILL OPEN DOOR TO MORE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

DIVISIONS BETWEEN THE CUBAN CLERGY AND THE VATICAN, AS REPORTED IN REFTEL. TO GET WHERE BOTH THE CUBAN CHURCH AND THE HOLY SEE WANT TO GO, HOWEVER, BOTH WILL HAVE TO MANAGE ANY DIFFERENCES THAT AROSE BETWEEN TEKLA AND CARDINAL ORTEGA OVER TEKLA'S 8PARACHUTE EVANGELIZATION." CARDINAL ORTEGA'S MARCH 19 PRIVATE AUDIENCE WITH THE POPE ON THE MARGINS OF A MEETING OF LATIN AMERICAN BISHOPS MAY HAVE BEEN A STEP IN THAT DIRECTION.

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